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Historic Bishop Hill

## MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SURVEY





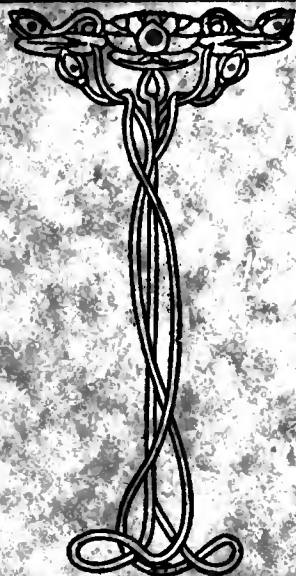
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# Historic Bishop Hill

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Gift of Ethel W. Sparr

ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY

Peter W. Wislander.

ILLUSTRATED SOUVENIR

# Seventy-fifth Anniversary

HISTORIC

BISHOP HILL

1846-1921

*75th Anniversary*

1846

# Seventy-fifth Anniversary. September Twenty-third

1921

*Inscribed to the Memory of the Brave Pioneers Whose Hearts  
Remained Undaunted Through Years of Toil and Suffering*



BISHOP HILL, ILLINOIS, settled seventy-five years ago, offers the student of History, or the passing traveler, material evidence of an active participation in the making of history in the early days of Henry county.

In this booklet no attempt has been made to give a complete history of the first settlement of Bishop Hill, but rather to preserve unto future generations the pictures of buildings erected by the early settlers before time entirely obliterates the memories of the past. Also to give a brief resume of the many difficulties encountered as they persistently hewed their homes on the broad prairies of Illinois; to show how untiringly they labored that their loved ones might have food and clothing and how fearless they were in time of danger and exposure; how these pioneers carried on, with the few comforts and no luxuries, confident in their hearts of the coming of a brighter day.

The sixteen years of spiritual unrest which preceeded the emigration was but the forerunner of a movement which brought 1100 able-bodied men and women into Henry county at a time when the population of the entire county was but four times that number and inaugurated that mighty tide of Scandinavian immigration which has flooded the entire Northwest with thriving villages and prosperous settlements.

The "Devotionalists" as they were called, led pious lives, seeking conscientious morality by private devotions and in studying the Scriptures in their own homes. Their earnest efforts for a cleaner life met with stern opposition from the clergy and the adherents of the established Church. They were severely persecuted and many of them arrested for their activities.



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Eric Janson became their spiritual leader. He was born at Biskop's Kulla, Sweden, in 1808. From his birthplace Bishop Hill derived its name. Some writers have alluded to this movement as being Communistic. Such, however, is not the case. One writer has aptly said, "communism became a necessity." Establishing a common fund was not considered until it was found that many of the "Devotionalists" lacked the means to pay their passage to America. Communal control of property was then adopted. The best part of the people, the peasants and artisans, joined the movement. They sought not wealth or power, but freedom of thought—the privilege to worship God according to the dictates of their own conscience. The sincerity of their faith is evidenced by their readiness to contribute all their earthly possessions to the common fund. One individual gave 24,000 crowns.

The leader and some of his followers were arrested on various pretexts. A reward for the apprehension of the leader was offered. His friends conspired to effect his escape over the Doverfield mountains into Norway, where in disguise he obtained passage to New York.

During this period plans had been made to establish a colony in America. An agent had been sent to this country to select a site for the proposed settlement. His travels extended through several states but his glowing report of the rich prairies of Henry county inspired his associates with new hope. When the time came for emigration 1100 people were prepared to abandon their homes for the sake of religion. No one wanted to be left behind and a feverish excitement reigned. For over a hundred miles they came, foot-sore and travel-stained. The sailing vessels were small and it was not possible for so many to secure passage on the same boat, nor from the same port. Crossing the Atlantic in those days required from six to thirteen weeks and the privations endured beggars description. Some of the frail craft were lost at sea. Most of the emigrants sailed from Gefle, Sweden, from which the city of Galva derived its name. The first party sailed from Gefle in the Summer of 1846.

Arriving at New York the several parties journeyed up the Hudson river to Albany, thence to Buffalo by way of the Erie canal and to Chicago by way of the Great Lakes. From Chicago most of them traveled afoot while a few walked all the way from Buffalo.

In August, 1846, two hundred and sixteen acres of land was bought at Red Oak, including buildings, stock

and grain, and in September the land comprising the present location of Bishop Hill was purchased. The first arrivals built substantial log cabins but when the immigrants came in larger numbers tents and sod houses were erected. A large party arriving in the fall of 1846 it became expedient to excavate dug-outs to obtain shelter for the winter. Twelve of these, 18x30 feet, were dug on both sides of the ravine near the present location of the "Big Brick." These were damp and unsanitary, causing much sickness and many deaths.

Their first concern was to provide a place of worship. A structure for this purpose was built of logs and canvas, in the form of a cross and called "The Tent Church." Services were held twice a day on week days and three times on Sunday. In 1848 the "Old Colony" church was built. The upper story was designed for church services and the lower floor for living rooms.

The first year 350 acres of sod was broken with a 36 inch plow drawn by eight yoke of oxen. Miles of sod fence was also constructed to protect the crops from wild and domestic animals running at large. The first harvest was cut with a "cradle." For weeks the young men swung this crude instrument day and night, the women bound the sheaves, the boys gathered them and the older men put them up in shocks. Going to and from the fields they marched in single file, singing some favorite melody of the homeland. Flax was raised extensively, the straw being manufactured into linen. The output of the banner year was over 30,000 yards. Broom corn raising and broom-making was another important industry. The sheds were destroyed by fire entailing a loss of about \$40,000.00. The first grain was threshed by a neighbor settler. His small machine was bought to use as a model for a larger outfit. The women planted the corn by hand. During the rush of harvest the shops were closed.

In the early days great difficulty was encountered in procuring sufficient food. What little grain they raised must be hauled long distances to be ground into flour. Fasting was at one time enforced. After futile attempts to supply their wants by using hand-mills the situation was relieved by the construction of a water-power mill, later supplanted by a steam mill.

The colonists firmly believed in education. A school for adults was held in the "tent" church and another at Red Oak for those stationed there. The children were taught in mud caves and later in some of the rooms in the

buildings. English was taught in all the schools. The last brick erected is the present school-house, built in 1860. The bell now in use was purchased at Christmastime, 1846, and was used to summon the colonists to worship and call them to meals.

In 1847 a number of adobe houses were built. In 1848 the manufacture of kiln-dried brick began. In all this work the women worked side by side with the men. In 1849 a party of nine men were sent to California to prospect for gold. They met with failure in this venture.

Three miles west of town was the saw-mill which furnished lumber for fences, furniture and buildings. Much of this lumber was black walnut, so plentiful as to be under-valued and used for all purposes. The foreman of this mill is still living and well preserved at the advanced age of 95 years.

The summer of 1849 was the saddest chapter in the history of the colony. Asiatic cholera was brought into the settlement by a party of immigrants and carried away 150 men and women in the prime of life. In 1850 the same fate befell a party of immigrants enroute for Bishop Hill while on the Great Lakes, only a few reaching their destination. Eric Janson also passed away in May of the same year.

In the days of its prosperity Bishop Hill was the commercial and industrial center of that vast territory lying between Peoria and Rock Island. No task was too intricate, no obstacle insurmountable. With improved conditions came better health. Each one did the work for which he was best adapted and no one was required to work beyond their strength. As a whole the colonists enjoyed as many comforts as the other settlers by whom they were surrounded.

Mechanics of ability were found in every shop. Carpenters, blacksmiths, shoe-makers, tailors, tanners, spinners, weavers, harness-makers, turners, clock-makers and others, all skilled in their line of work. Each department was under the supervision of an experienced superintendent. Prosperity seemed assured. They were building their village, owned 12,000 acres of land and were developing the agricultural resources. In 1853 they obtained a charter by a special act of the Legislature by which active control of the property and business of the corporation was given to seven trustees.

In 1854 the colonists performed much work at Galva, where they owned fifty town lots and other property. They dug the first well in Galva, built the first brick building and constructed an elevator and warehouse for the storage of grain. The brick used in all these operations were hauled from the yards near Bishop Hill with ox teams driven by "The Ox Boys of Bishop Hill." They also did much grading for the C. B. & Q., then under construction.

But with prosperity also came many reverses. They lost considerably during the panic of 1857 as well as in banking operations at Galva. These reverses stirred up strife and discord. The old-time religious ties had been weakening for some time and a cloud of discontent cast a shadow upon the prosperous scene. The coming of the Civil War also helped to aggravate the disastrous combination. Fifty-three of the young men had responded to Lincoln's call for troops, leaving the industrial development to the older men at a critical time.

The dissolution of the colony was finally decided upon as the only panacea for the threatened disruption. The division of property followed and this was made upon the basis of age of each individual, not upon the length of service. Remarkable as it may seem this division was generally conceded to be just.

192 The history of Bishop Hill will never die. It is the story of a great people cherished in the hearts of the descendants throughout the land. The many imposing buildings, the magnificent elms and maples, the beautiful park laid out by them, while speaking of the glory of the past, adds to the beauty of the present. The years will come and go. The last colonist will be laid to rest, but what records of courage and endurance, of earnestness and principle and of industry and enterprise have been left by these pioneers as monuments to point the road of triumph to after generations!



For further information the reader may refer to "History of Bishop Hill Colony," by M. A. Mikkelsen, A. M., Fellow in History Johns Hopkins University. An article on the same subject in Kiner's "History of Henry County," by P. J. Stoneberg. "The Swedish Element in Illinois," by Ernest W. Olson. "Svenskarne i Illinois," by Capt. Eric Johnson, and others.



Old Settlers' Monument, Bishop Hill, Ill.

# INSCRIPTION

1846

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF

The Hardy Pioneers

Who, in order to Secure

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Left Sweden, Their Native Land,

With all the Endearments

Of Home and Kindred

And Founded

BISHOP HILL COLONY

On the Uninhabited Prairies of

ILLINOIS

Erected by Surviving Members

And Descendants on the

50th Anniversary,

September Twenty Third

1896

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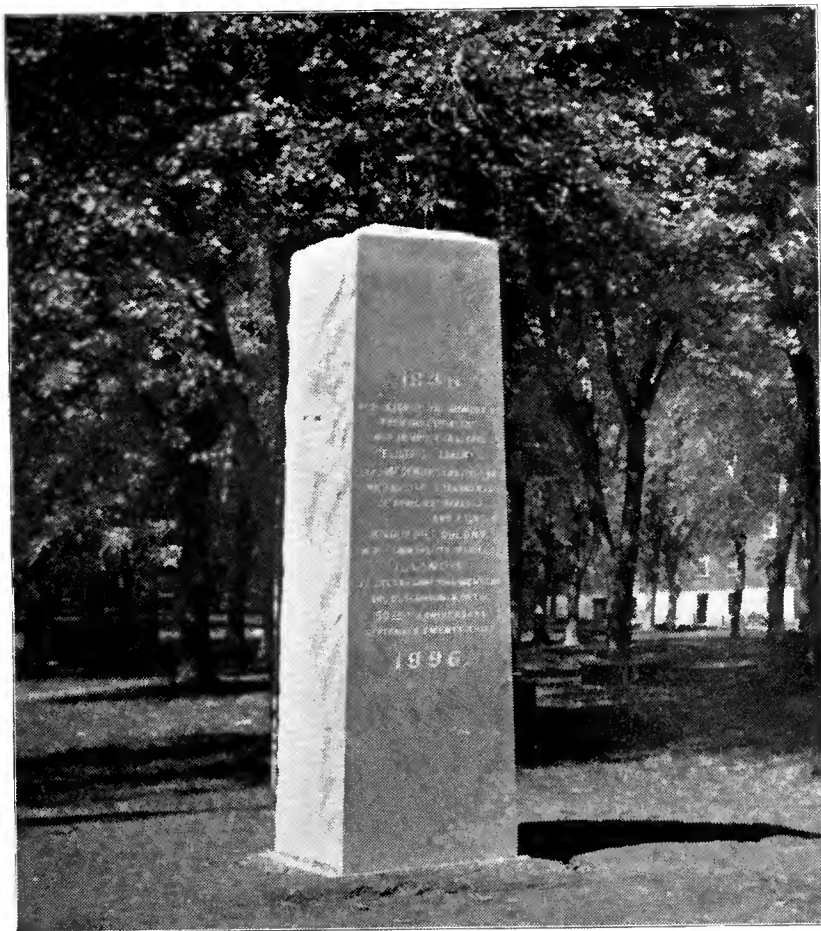
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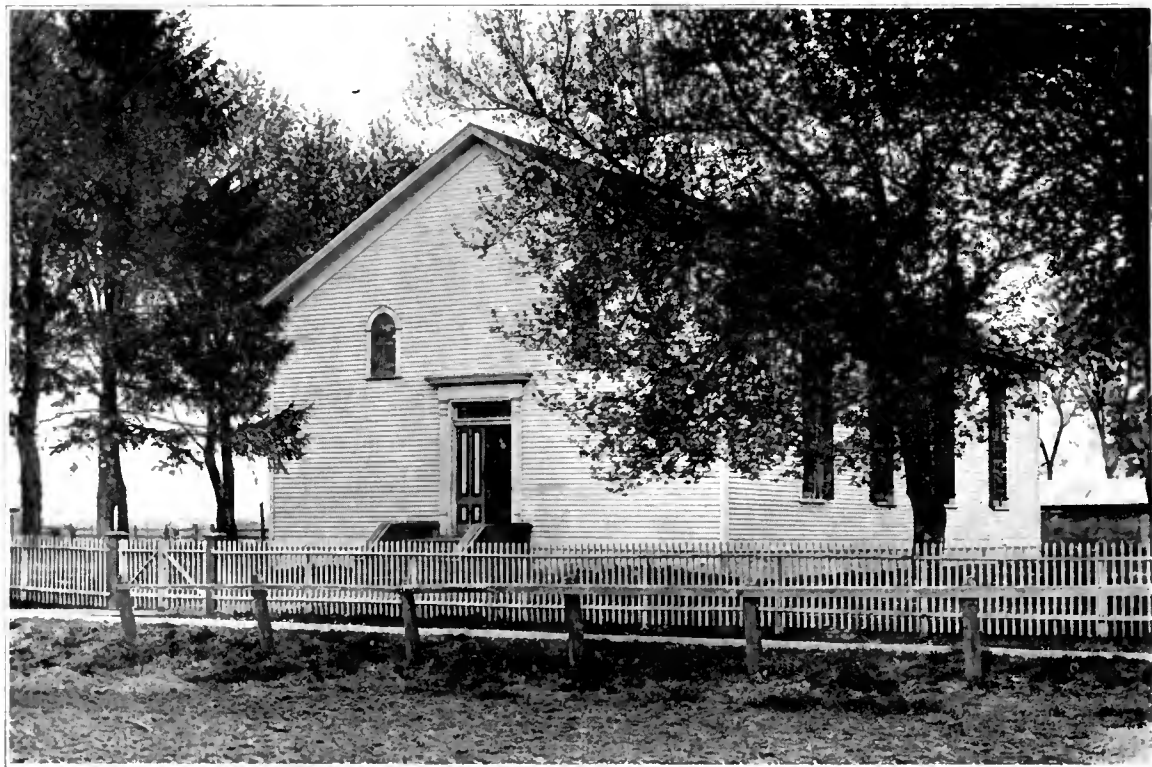


Old Colony Church. Erected 1848

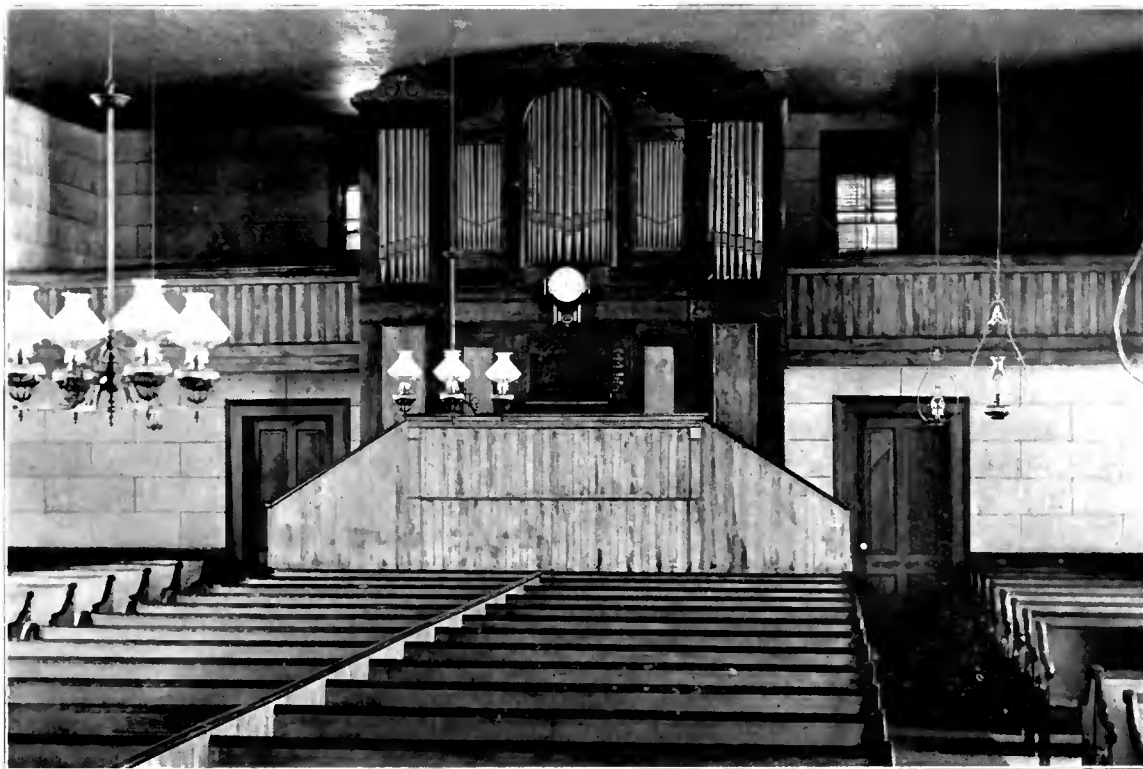




Interior, Old Colony Church. Pews are Native Black Walnut. Spindles of Maple



M. E. Church, Erected 1869



Interior View of M. E. Church, Showing Pipe Organ



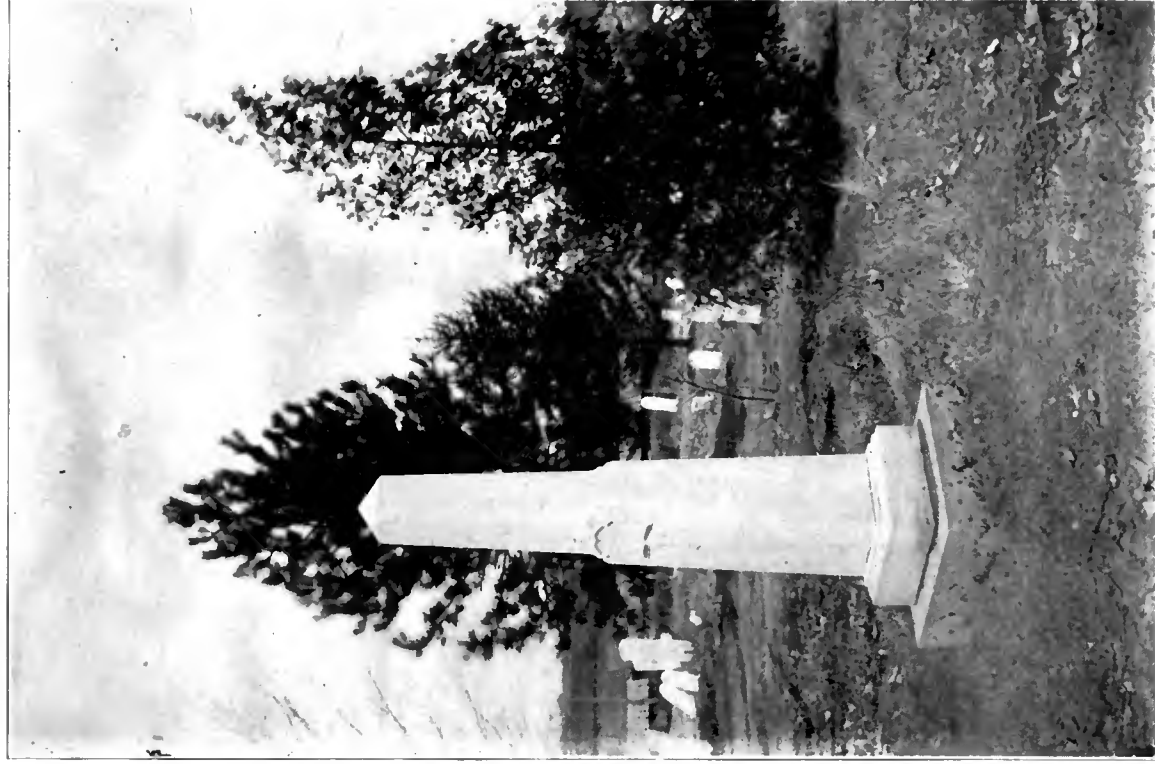
Bishop Hill School House. Built in 1860



Colony Hospital Building



Monument in Red Oak, dedicated in 1882 in Memory of 50 Colonists who died in 1846-47. A replica of this Monument dedicated at LaGrange at the same time in Memory of 70 Cholera Victims.



Eric Janson's Monument in Bishop Hill Cemetery



View of Public Park from Northeast. In this Park Old Settlers' Re-Unions have been held Annually on September 23rd for Twenty-five Years





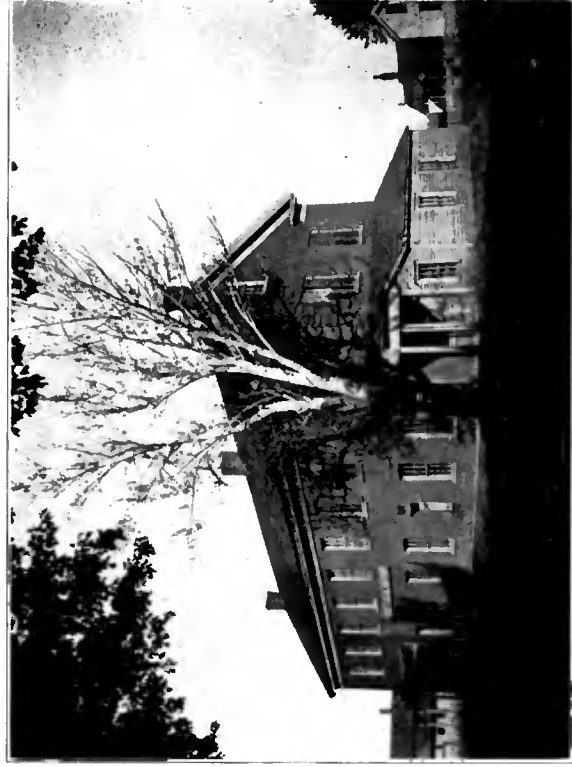
Dairy Building. Butter and Cheese Factory. Harness and Brooms were also Made in this Building.



"Big Brick" Erected in 1848-51. Four Story Building. 45x200 Feet. Contains 96 Large Rooms. Also 6 Halls.



"Big Brick." Basement used as Kitchen and Dining Rooms. Eighteen Women worked in the Kitchen. Twelve Waitresses Served the Food.



Blacksmith Shop. Upper Floor Used as Carpenter Shop



Carriage and Wagon Shop. Second Floor Used as Paint Shop



Old Colony Bakery and Brewery



Familiar Scene in Early Pioneer Days



Steeple Building. Built in 1854. Clock installed in 1859 was made by Three Colonists and Patterned after a Hall Clock. This home-made movement has faithfully recorded every passing hour for 62 years



View of Bishop Hill from the North in 1855. Steam Mill in the Fore-ground. Taken from a painting

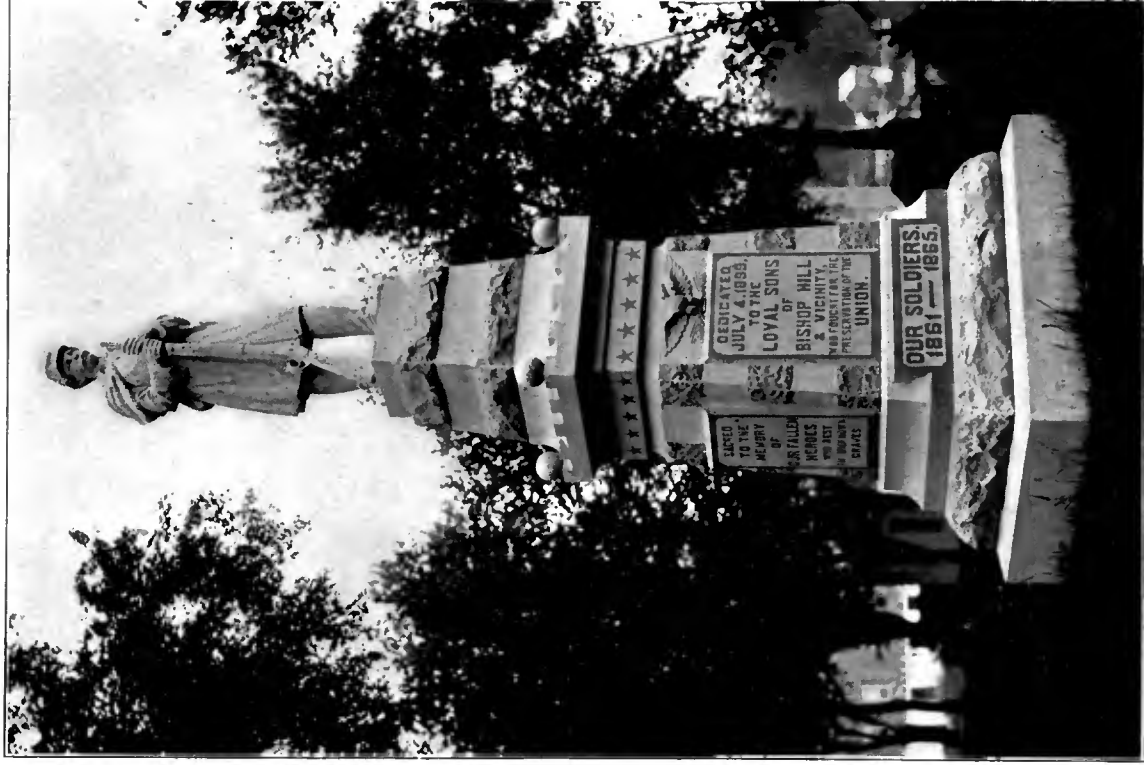
Steeple Building as Originally Built



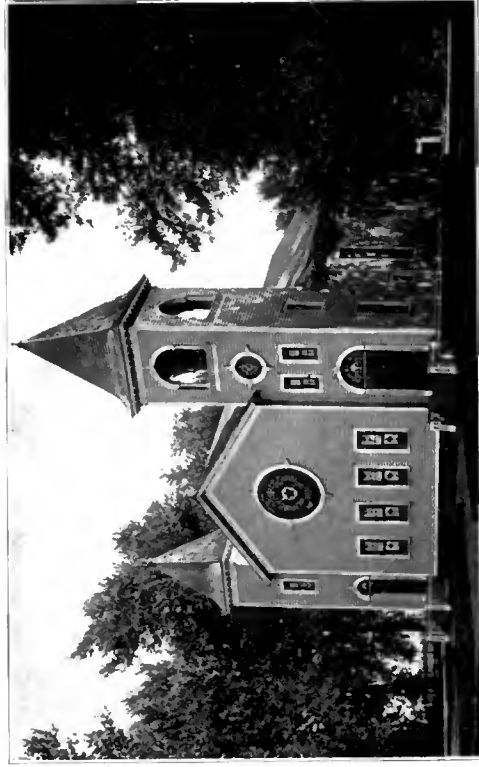


Street Scene. Looking West South Side of Park

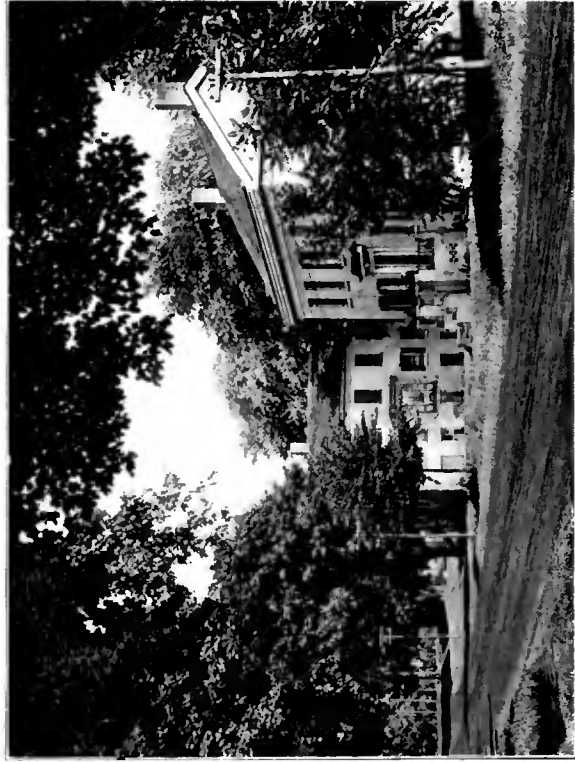




Soldiers' Monument in Public Park, Dedicated July 4, 1899.



Community M. E. Church as Re-modeled in 1899.



Old Colony Buildings



Colony Store and Post Office



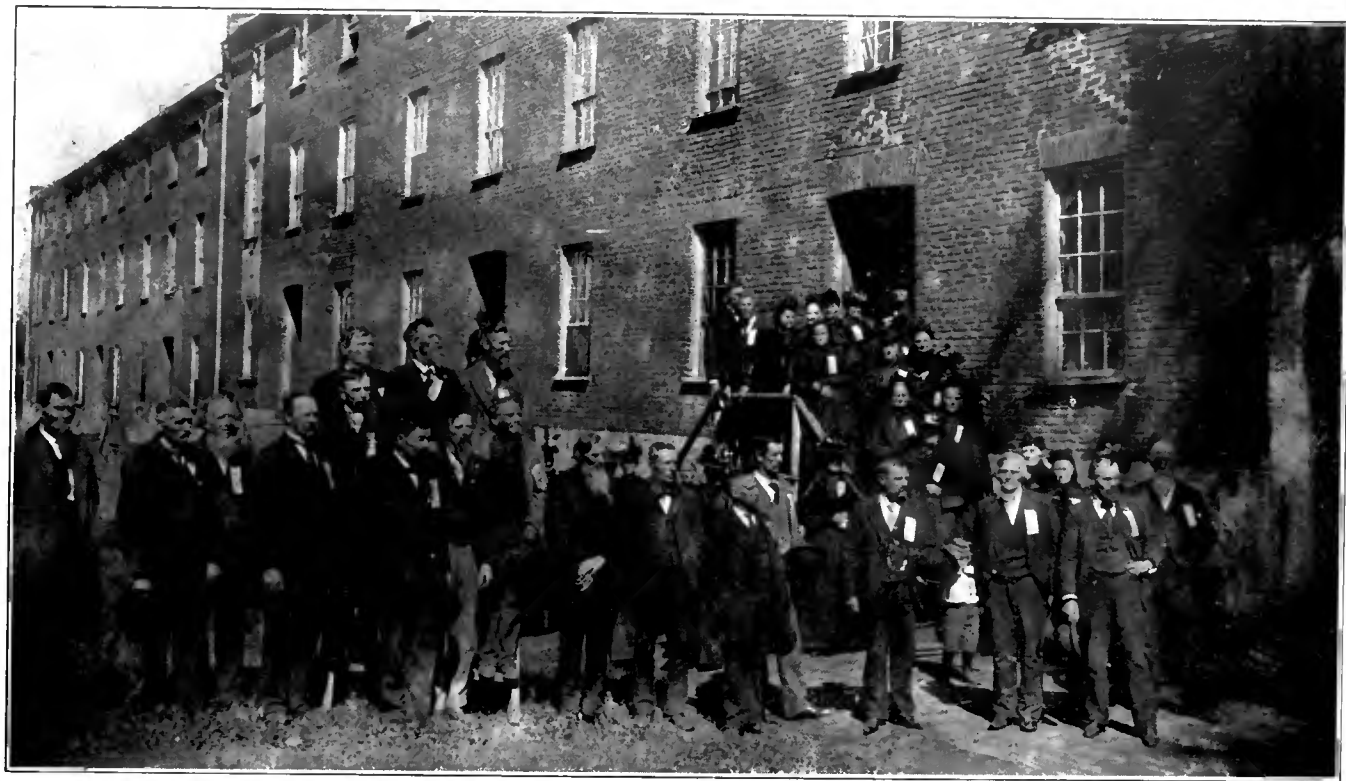
Hotel Building



The Mill Stream



Old Settlers Group. 50th Anniversary, 1896.



Old Settlers Group. 50th Anniversary, 1896.



"Young" Old Settlers Group. 50th Anniversary, 1896













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